

Egypt as a Failing State: Implications for US National Security

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this fifty-first volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the United States Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). This paper is recommended both for its conceptual applicability in today's international security environment and for its specific policy analysis of the United States relationship with the Middle East and Egypt. In general terms, Ruth Beitler and Cindy Jebb present a pointed review of democratization theory and practice that is most timely given recent and ongoing United States experiences in the Balkans and in Iraq. They extend that analysis to address the dangers and realities of state failures—partial or complete—as these fuel the cycle of development of violent non-state actors. And most significantly, they apply that combined analysis to the critical realities of today's Middle East, and specifically to the linchpin state of Egypt. Also of note, they address United States policy as a central element of this calculus, examining its multiple levels of effects. Thus, the paper has wide applicability to United States national security policy and outcomes both toward its central target of focus and well beyond into the region and the world today. We commend this research effort as well as the specific paper, and we endorse further inquiry into this emerging realm of security policy and practice—particularly as US military forces find themselves serving as the “pointed end” of its “spear.”

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JAMES M. SMITH
Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Short-term solutions to more profound, long-term problems are not sufficient to safeguard United States interests in the Middle East. This paper challenges the current US policy towards Egypt and its underlying assumption that regime stability supercedes a US interest in true political development. The key question in this paper queries why the status quo policy towards Egypt is no longer fulfilling US objectives when it has been a successful pillar for US Middle East policy in the past. In the wake of terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 leading to the US war on terror, along with the continued violence between the Palestinians and Israelis, the potential for acute political violence within Egypt is high. This study presents two scenario-driven US policy options and recommends a realpolitik view of democratization for Egypt. The United States can no longer afford to be timid about the power of democracy. For the United States, pushing for political systems that are accountable to their populations should not be viewed in an idealistic, normative sense, but rather in a strategic context. This paper contends that democracy is a security imperative for the post-9/11 world.

